DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 114 583 CE 005 443

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TITLE Educational Counseling of Adults: Where It's At.
PUB DATE Oct 75
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Conference on Advising and Counseling Adult Learners (Albany, New York, October 1-2, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Characteristics; *Adult Counseling; *Adult Education; Counseling Effectiveness; Counselor Attitudes; Counselor Functions; *Counselor Role; *Educational Needs

ABSTRACT

"Counseling adults is the most impoverished, depressed, but developing area in the entire area of adult education." This is due to: (1) a lack of serious commitment by the educational community, (2) a lack of adequate literature, and (3) a lack of clear-cut role distinctions. The limited number of research studies on counseling adults conclude that more progression is found among counseled groups than noncounseled groups and that existing guidance services for adults are inadequate to meet clientele needs. The essence of counseling is the relationship between counselor and client which places emphasis on the client's perception of his/her environment. The role of a counselor may be clarified by examining what tasks counselors of adults perform or by studying the competencies identified as needed for counseling in adult education. Of basic importance in counseling adults is to understand the needs of adults. Moreover, adult students bring many anxieties, over and above those in any learning situation regardless of age or level, to the learning situation. Another consideration is counselor attitudes toward the adult counselee which can influence the counseling process. Abraham Maslow's explanation of self-actualization is recommended as an ideal model for counselors when dealing with adults. (EA)

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"EDUCATIONAL COUNSELING OF ADULTS: WHERE IT'S AT"

ADDRESS GIVEN BY

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CONFERENCE ON ADVISING AND
COUNSELING ADULT LEARNERS

Albany, N.Y.

October 1-2, 1975

CE005 443

Counseling adults is the most impoverished, depressed, but developing area in the entire area of adult education. It is in this state for three reasons:

1. Lack of serious commitment by the educational community.
2. Lack of adequate literature.
3. Lack of clear-cut role distinctions.

1. LACK OF SERIOUS COMMITMENT BY THE EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY.

One observer has stated that "Very few adult educators dispute the need of counselors within adult education programs. Those connected with adult and continuing education programs realize that the responsibility for a student's welfare goes beyond the classroom lecture. Various federal programs (Educational Acts of 1964-1966) and Presidential Commissions (Kennedy's Commission on the Education of Women) have added credence to the fact that these special services are needed," (Glick, 1969, p.1.).

Harold L. Hodgkinson, director of the National Institute of Education (NIE) recently observed that the trend toward older clientele on campuses indicates an interest in continuing education. He noted that thirty-year-old students, in general, said they were dissatisfied with their intellectual development. One out of five desired counseling, and one out of three said they need help to make life more meaningful.

Many administrators mouth the need for and usefulness of counselors, but they are not committed to this rhetoric, at least not with dollars.

Far too many institutions have untrained and unqualified individuals who are assigned the responsibility of counseling. Often this is only a small part of their jobs. The same individuals are required to do all sorts of other unrelated tasks from clerical filing up to and including teaching.

Even at the institutions where there are trained and qualified counselors, their load is overwhelming. At one of the better institutions there is one

counselor for every 600 students. Many institutions have much larger ratios.

For the record I want to state it clearly and emphatically: there are growing numbers of dedicated counselors who are both trained and qualified to work with adult learners. Your presence at this conference testifies to your concerns about the field.

2. LACK OF ADEQUATE LITERATURE

Ten years ago I looked at the literature in counseling adults in educational settings and found that it was almost non-existent. Five years ago, I took another look, and still another look in preparation for this presentation. Despite the efforts we made at the ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult Education during the time I was director, identifying documents pertinent and relevant to the issue was an unrewarding one. Even now there is only a trickle of documents dealing with the subject.

There is hardly any worthwhile documentation of a research nature about counseling adults in education. Some documents are beginning to appear, but most of them are addressing themselves to women only. The rest of the documents are of the "how" variety, providing guides for the practicing counselor. Typically such literature deals with problems facing the counseling of adults; techniques and tolls of adult counseling such as counseling interviews, testing adults, adult learning characteristics and their implications for counseling, and working with women, veterans, older adults, and minority groups.

Here are two studies bearing on the issue and worth noting if only because they represent practically all that there is.

A study of adult students in Louisiana 1966-67 (Acadia Parish Pilot Study 1966-1967) reached the following conclusions:

> Guidance and Counseling assists the student; and there is more progression among the counseled groups than the non-counseled groups in the area of educational, occupational, and social categories.

Another study examined guidance program of LA City Adult Schools (Steward, 1967) determine if existing guidance services are adequately meeting clientele needs, and came up with these findings:

1. predominance of educational over vocational counseling;
2. extremely limited information services;
3. inadequate data on students personal, social and mental status;
4. little attention to student vocational interests, aptitudes, preferences, personality, out-of-school activities, or work experience;
5. the expenditure of much working time on routine clerical duties because of personnel shortages;
6. lack of suitable training and experience among about half the guidance counselors; and,
7. poor provision for follow-up services.

3. LACK OF CLEAR-CUT ROLE DISTINCTIONS

Counseling has been described in various ways including in terms of the group counseled -- adolescent, parent, normal, abnormal; it has been related to educational, vocational, social, or personal problems; and it has been explained according to techniques -- client-centered, directive, existential, or other.

A definition developed at the Chatham Conference (1965) goes this way:

"Counseling is a systematic exploration of self and/or environment by a client with the aid of a counselor to clarify self-understanding and/or environmental alternatives so that behavior modification or decisions are made on the basis of greater cognitive and affective understanding."

The essence of counseling is the relationship between the counselor and the client. The emphasis is upon the individual as he/she perceives his/her environment.

One way to understand the role of a counselor is to examine what tasks counselors perform. Here is a listing of the typical tasks counselors perform: assist adults in course selection when enrolling; help adults make appropriate long-range educational and/or vocational plans; assist the individual adult define and find ways to resolve personal problems; select, administer, score tests, as well as explain test results to adults and teachers; help in evaluating total program; and in addition they work on publicity, advertising, recruiting, registering and whatever else needs doing (Scaggs & Ulmer, 1972).

In some ways, counselors perform the teaching function as well. The following guidance roles permeate the entire teaching role in a Teacher-Guidance function:

1. To aid in the adjustment of the individual adult learners by providing a climate in each set of learning experiences which promote desirable learner adjustment.
2. To integrate occupational, educational, and personal-social adjustment information into the adult learner's experience.
3. To encourage adult learners to avail themselves of the facilities of the guidance program.
4. To provide information which will help the adult learner's personal records current.

5. To be alert to the use of the facilities of the existing community agencies that may assist in reaching the objectives of the guidance program.
6. To assist the adult learners in developing and maintaining a desirable pattern of attitudes and behaviors which will facilitate maximum learning. (Mitchell, 1971 p. 316)

Another way of understanding the counseling role is to study the competencies identified as needed for counseling in adult education. One such list of competencies follows:

1. Skill in the techniques of counseling.
2. Skill in acquiring and disseminating educational and occupational information.
3. Some understanding of learning theory and adult learning characteristics of counselees.
4. Some understanding of the sociological and psychological characistics of counselees.
5. Understanding of the client's world.
6. Understanding the nature of the system(s) in, or with which the counselor will be working.
7. Ability to accept a counselee as he/she is, with all his/her problems, conflicts, and instabilities.
8. Congruence -- no contradiction between what the counselor is and what he/she says. (Westervelt, 1966)

In counseling adults, it is necessary to understand the needs of adults. Among the factors related to the needs of adults are the following: lack of self-confidence in one's ability to learn; unrealistic expectations of progress; conflicting values and attitudes; theoretical or irrevelant learning tasks;

seeking help too late or in the wrong places; lack of efficient reading and study habits; press of time; significance of long range goals; implications of family life; greater life experiences; employment and job circumstances; mechanics of attending class; past memories as obstacles; voluntary basis of continuing education; and lack of continuity with faculty and counselors. (Porter, 1970)

The counselor is a specialist in assisting adults to become more effective learners. This is accomplished as the counselor helps adults resolve vocational, educational and personal problems. In providing this assistance the counselor also helps the adult assume greater self responsibility.

Besides needs, adult students bring with themselves many anxieties, over and above those in any learning situation regardless of age or level. These anxieties are the result of "physical changes such as the decrement of vision, hearing, and over-all loss of energy frequently manifest themselves in the erection of defenses which in turn become barriers to learning." (Griswold, 1971)

Besides the problems the counselee brings, there is another consideration in counseling which is sometimes overlooked -- the attitude of the counselor. According to Goldie Kaback, "both the counseling process and the projected aims of this process are firmly bound to the counselor's own concept of self and his own perception of the nature of man." (Kaback, 1967)

One instance of how the counselor's attitudes toward the adult counselee can influence the process is noted in a study of the extent of age-bias among counselors working with adult clients in educational settings. It was found that women counselors are generally less age-biased than men. However, aside from sex, no other characteristic of the counselor measured shows any significant relationship with "age-bias", neither age, years of counseling experience, nor specialized courses or training in counseling, though there is a trend in the data toward specialized courses contributing to greater "age-bias." (Troll and Schlossberg, 1969)

Abraham Maslow maintains that "Counseling is not concerned with training or with molding or with teaching in the ordinary sense of telling people what to do and how to do it. It is not concerned with propaganda. It is a Taoistic uncovering and then helping. Taoistic means the noninterfering, the 'letting be.' Taoism is not a laissez-faire philosophy or a philosophy of neglect or of refusal to help or cure." (Maslow, 1967, p. 285)

With adults we already have a start with something to work with: we already have capacities, talents, directions, missions, callings. The job is, if we are to take this model seriously, to help them to be more perfectly what they already are, to be more full, more actualizing, more realizing in fact what they are in potentiality.

Maslow's explanation of self-actualization can serve as an ideal model for counselors when dealing with adults. As an ideal, it is demanding. I have compressed Maslow's thinking into the following highlights for the sake of brevity and urge you to search out the original and study it more deeply and leisurely.

1. Self-actualization means experiencing fully, vividly, selflessly, with full concentration and total absorption. It means experiencing without the self-consciousness of the adolescent. The key word is "selflessly" as opposed to self-consciousness/self-awareness.
2. Self-actualization, as an on-going process means making each of many single choices as a growth choice. We have the option to make a growth choice or a regression choice (fear choice).
3. Self-actualization implies that there is a self to be actualized. We must listen to the impulse voices meaning letting the self emerge. Most of us,-most of the time, listen not to ourselves out to the voice of the Establishment, of the Elders, of authority or of tradition.
4. Self-actualization means taking responsibility -- being honest. We are not honest. Our clients are not honest with us; they are playing

games and posing.

5. Self-actualization means daring to be different, unpopular, non-conformist--to be courageous rather than afraid.
6. Self-actualization as a process and an end is working to do well the things one wants to do--to become first rate or as good as one can be.
7. Peak experiences are transient moments of self-actualization. Almost all of us have peak experiences but not everyone knows it. Peak experiences are moments of ecstacy which cannot be bought, cannot be guaranteed, cannot even be sought. One must be, as C.S. Lewis wrote, "surprised by joy." But one can set up the conditions so that peak experiences are more likely, or one can perversely set up conditions so that they are less likely.
8. Self-actualization is opening yourself up to yourself -- finding out who you are, what you are, what you like and don't like, what is good for you and what bad, where you are going, and what your mission is. It means identifying defenses, and after defenses have been identified, it means finding the courage to give them up.

According to Gardner Murphy, "...if he who offers guidance is a whole person, with real roots in human culture, he cannot help conveying directly or indirectly to every client what he himself sees and feels, and the perspective in which his own life is lived. Is it to be a technician's perspective, or are the techniques to be subordinated to wisdom in living? If the guide is more than a technician, he will not be afraid to guide." (Kaback, 1973, p. 29)

There you have it -- the state of educational counseling of adults. We need to convince administrators to put hard dollars behind their articulated importance of counseling. We need to involve more researchers to study counseling needs of adults and the effectiveness of counseling practices. And, you as counselors must work towards clearer role definitions of the counselor's function

in various educational settings for adults, both in traditional and the recent non-traditional settings.

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